

CLAIM AMENDMENTS

1. (Currently Amended) A hopper ~~Hopper~~ vessel for temporarily holding a load of solid particulates, having a receiver part with a downwardly converging wall that is at an apex thereof provided with a discharge port for discharging the load, which receiver part is provided with an aerator for aerating the load, the aerator comprising a supply passage in the form of a tubular member connectable to a supply of a pressurised aeration fluid or pressurising fluid whereby the pressurized aeration fluid or pressurising fluid is transportable through the supply passage, whereby the tubular member comprises a side wall that is provided with one or more openings perforating the tubular member side wall, for allowing passage of the pressurized aeration fluid or the pressurising fluid from the supply passage into the hopper vessel, which tubular member is positioned on or close to the converging wall.
2. (Currently Amended) A hopper ~~Hopper~~ vessel according to claim 1, wherein the supply passage is connectable to a pressurisation device.
3. (Currenty Amended) A hopper ~~Hopper~~ vessel according to claim 1 ~~or~~ 2, wherein the tubular member extends in a substantially off-vertical direction.
4. (Currently Amended) A hopper ~~Hopper~~ vessel according to claim 3, wherein the one or more openings in the supply passage side wall face an upward direction.
5. (Currently Amended) A hopper ~~Hopper~~ vessel according to claim 1, 2, 3, ~~or~~ 4, wherein the tubular supply passage extends along a longitudinal tube axis, and the discharge port is in alignment with the longitudinal tube axis.
6. (Currently Amended) A hopper ~~Hopper~~ vessel according to claim 5, ~~any one of the previous claims~~, wherein the one or more openings are provided with a distributor comprising a porous material, ~~preferably made of a sintered metal~~, for supporting the solid particulates and allowing passage of pressurized aeration fluid or the pressurising fluid.

7. (Currently Amended) A hopper ~~Hopper~~ vessel according to claim 6, ~~any one of the previous claims~~, wherein there is a discharge zone defined inside the hopper vessel which discharge zone stretches vertically above the discharge port, whereby the supply passage is provided outside the discharge zone.

8. (Currently Amended) A hopper ~~Hopper~~ vessel according to claim 7, ~~any one of the previous claims~~, wherein the one or more openings are arranged to bring pressurized aeration fluid or the pressurising fluid into the hopper vessel in a direction facing away from the converging wall.

9. (Currently Amended) A sluice ~~Sluice~~ vessel for feeding solid particulates into a pressurized pressure vessel, the sluice vessel in use having a low pressure state and a high pressure state, the sluice vessel comprising means for charging the sluice vessel with a load of the solid particulates when the sluice vessel is in its low pressure state, at least one discharge port, and pressurising means for increasing the pressure inside the sluice vessel by bringing a pressurising fluid into the sluice vessel, to bring the sluice vessel into its high pressure state before discharging the load via the discharge port, whereby the pressurising means comprises one or more pressurising fluid inlet means arranged to be submerged under the load of solid particulates, the pressurising fluid inlet means comprising a supply passage in the form of a tubular member for transporting the pressurising fluid whereby the tubular member comprises a side wall that is provided with one or more openings perforating the tubular member side wall, for allowing passage of the pressurising fluid from the supply passage into the sluice vessel.

10. (Currently Amended) A sluice ~~Sluice~~ vessel according to claim 9, wherein the tubular member extends in a substantially off-vertical direction whereby the one or more openings face an upward direction.

11. (Currently Amended) A sluice ~~Sluice~~ vessel according to claims 9 or 10, wherein the one or more openings are provided with a distributor comprising a porous material, preferably ~~made of a sintered metal~~, for supporting the solid particulates and allowing passage of the pressurising fluid, which distributor is mechanically supported by the supply passage for

withstanding a pressure difference across the distributor corresponding to at least the pressure difference between the low pressure state and a high pressure state.

12. (Currently Amended) A sluice ~~Sluice~~ vessel according to claim 11, ~~any one of claims 9 to 11~~, wherein there is a discharge zone defined inside the sluice vessel which discharge zone stretches vertically above the discharge port, whereby the supply passage is provided outside the discharge zone.

13. (Currently Amended) A sluice ~~Sluice~~ vessel according to claim ~~10, 11 or~~ 12, having a part with a downwardly converging wall forming at an apex thereof the at least one discharge port, wherein the pressurising fluid inlet means are arranged in, on, or close to the converging wall.

14. (Currently Amended) A sluice ~~Sluice~~ vessel according to claim 13, wherein the pressurising fluid inlet means are arranged to bring the pressurising fluid into the sluice vessel in a direction facing away from the converging wall.

15. (Currently Amended) A method ~~Method~~ of operating a sluice vessel for feeding solid particulates into a pressurised pressure vessel, the sluice vessel comprising at least one discharge port, wherein the sluice vessel is brought from a low pressure state to a high pressure state, comprising the steps of:

charging the sluice vessel with a load of the solid particulates when the sluice is in its low pressure state;

bringing the sluice vessel into its high pressure state, before discharging the load via the discharge port, by bringing a pressurising fluid into the sluice vessel thereby increasing the pressure inside the sluice vessel;

whereby at least part of the pressurising fluid is brought into the sluice vessel via one or more pressurising fluid inlet means provided as one or more openings perforating a tubular member side wall submerged under the load of solid particulates.

16. (Currently Amended) A method ~~Method~~ according to claim 15, further comprising the step of discharging the load via the discharge port, while aerating the load by allowing a flow of an aeration fluid through the one or more pressurising fluid inlet means.

17. (Currently Amended) A method ~~Method~~ according to claim 16, wherein the aeration fluid is actively injected into the load of the solid particulates, whereby ~~preferably one or both of~~ a selected pressure and a selected volumetric rate of the aeration fluid is controlled.